

# CRYSTAL AMONG COAL

Entry No. 42 in Our Prize Story Competition

BY HERMAN SCHEFFAUER



"The Stables and Deadwork Are Afire!"

MRS. DUNFORD fastened a long motor veil over her cap and tied the ends under her chin. Her husband had donned an old buff rubber coat which hid his fashionable garments. His own hat lay on the table; a greasy miner's cap was pulled over his scant iron gray hair. A feeling of aversion more intense than usual came over his handsome wife; for between him and the rough miners that stood about all visible and external differences had vanished. The features of this New York mine broker were heavy and plain and coarse as theirs; but they were harder too, the eyes small and crafty, the whole face lacking the hearty, simple kindness that redeemed these begrimed and sooty faces. Even the cropped mustache and side whiskers he had lately affected had lost their distinction.

Lawrence Dunford surveyed all things with critical and expert eye. He was about to purchase the Poole-Kethley Colliery, and knew anthracite mines of old. Sixteen years ago he had been superintendent of the Darvene Colliery at Kennesbarre, thirty miles to the east. Yesterday, when he was about to leave New York on this errand of inspection, his wife had begged him to take her with him. In her request there had been an insistent and unusual wistfulness he could not understand—but then there was much in her he could never understand. She had always hated or pretended to hate these black mining regions of Pennsylvania, where she had been born and where he had first met her as a very young woman. Something reminiscent stirred within him, something that touched upon some hidden, unblunted nerve, called into life by this haunting, dark, and unforgotten glamour of the mines.

He glanced at his wife. She too seemed under the spell. Was she, like him, thinking of Kennesbarre.—Kennesbarre that meant so much to both? He felt that the thought of her thought was bitter to him.

THREE empty iron cars stood on the slanting track beneath the hoisting shed in front of the enormous drums on which the steel cables wound. Dunford assisted his wife into the third car, and bade her sit down on the dust covered bottom. He crouched beside her. Strachey climbed in, and righted the oil flares on their caps.

A bell clanged; the cars began to move downward.

Less than a foot above their heads the heavy timbers and bare rock of the slope

tunnel rushed by as the cars clanged and jerked their way into the depths. As the pitch of the vein ran steep, the cars shot down almost perpendicularly, and Mrs. Dunford braced herself against the sides, a vague terror at the heart, a sense of fear and gloom crushing her spirits. Only once before had she descended into a coal mine. She was but seventeen then; it was at Kennesbarre, in company with one she had known and cherished then—one who long ago had made his last descent into the earth. Her memories delved backward into the past, as she sat beside her elderly, cold hearted husband. At last the cars slowed down and came heavily to rest at the bottom of the slope.

"The thirteen-hundred-foot level," called out the breaker boss.

They stood in a lateral gangway between the transverse rails on which a draw of loaded cars had just been brought to the slope by a blind mule. The blank, stony eyeballs of the animal shone spectral in the ruddy, uncertain light.

"The thirteen hundred foot level?" repeated Lawrence Dunford. "She goes deeper than that?"

"Only in the abandoned workings, Sir," answered the old man, "in the 'robbed' workings to the north. Those run to fifteen hundred feet."

A tall, bearded man stood near the tracks, erect and motionless. The light in his cap threw deep shadows upon his features, which, powdered to a dusky tinge by the coal dust, had almost the semblance of a black mask.

"Henry, these are the visitors," said Joel Strachey. "Show the gentleman whatever he wishes to see—he has an order from the directors."

"All right, Joel," replied the fire boss.

It was Henry Mavis who, because of his liberal, self acquired education, his superior manners and good English, was always chosen to guide visitors through the great colliery. Yet by habit he spoke little, and always in a subdued, monotonous tone acquired in the silence of the coal pits. His large and pensive eyes glanced indifferently at the man and woman; he bowed, then led them along the gangway. Between the side timbers sat men and youths in the darkness, silent, or speaking in low tones as the visitors passed. Some smoked pipes.

"Smoking in mines is dangerous," said Dunford. "I'd not permit it myself."

"Our big up-cast fans keep the air sweet and fresh," answered the fire boss, "and, though this was once a fiery, gassy mine, we've had no trouble from that source for years."

"I observe that all your lights are naked," said Dunford.

"Quite safe, Sir. In case of fire, we could flood the lower levels in a few minutes."

BY the light of his own lamp, Dunford made a note in a little book with a gold pencil. Mrs. Dunford spoke no word—the weird scenes, as well as her thoughts, oppressed her and denied all speech. She stumbled along as in a dream, gazing with vague eyes upon all. It was as if she were buried alive with him forever and forever. The little flames burning on their caps—were not these like the feeble flickering and smoky fires of their own lives? How much smoke there was always mingled with the flame! If the torch of life might burn clear, with a light pure and white, radiant as—

"Madam, permit me to give you this piece of spar. Not everything in a coal mine is black," said the stately fire boss gravely, as he handed Mrs. Dunford a morsel of rough, milk white rock studded with sparkling, pointed crystals. Something in his voice startled her; her eyes, half hidden beneath her cap and the large veil, sought his own in the uncertain gloom. She took the crystals and thanked him. Now and again he offered her his strong hand to help her over dark and boggy places. The air roared and pulled behind them as the ventilating doors were opened. They traversed tunnel after tunnel. In passing a group of miners, Mavis remarked to the foreman that they would pass at once to the higher levels after the visitors had seen this one. Finally they encountered no more teams, no miners. These headings were not worked at present, the fire boss told them. A full half-mile now separated them from the nearest workers.

"There is danger here only when blasting is done," said the fire boss in a low voice. "The shale is very loose. Sometimes it falls, and the men are buried alive. Sometimes we get them out in time,—or parts of them by quick surgery,—quick and crude." Mrs. Dunford shuddered.

"Buried alive!" she exclaimed. "Oh! Once—"

"Come!" said her husband roughly.

The bearded, black faced fire boss pointed out the close timbering in this passage. "There are bands of slate and sulphur here," he explained, "that cause us heaps of trouble."

"Timbers here 'skin to skin,'" said Dunford, as he again drew forth his notebook; "strata of slate and sulphur."

Henry Mavis flung a glance of respectful curiosity toward this well informed stranger; but said nothing.

They walked to the end of the wide and Stygian driftway. Here there was an opening tightly boarded up.

"This," said Mavis, "leads up and then down to the old abandoned workings on the fifteen-hundred-foot level."

"I'd like to inspect those levels," said the mine speculator.

"No visitors are permitted there," was the miner's reply; "this brattice cuts off all access."

"I have full permission from the owners to see all parts of this mine," said Dunford arrogantly. "It is necessary that I see this part too. The brattice can be removed."

MAVIS made no reply; but his face grew stern. Then he recalled the words of old Strachey, "Show the gentleman whatever he wishes to see—he has an order from the directors." He hesitated a moment, then remarked, "Very well—wait here. I will fetch an ax."

When he had gone, silence lay between husband and wife. For a moment their

eyes met; then Mrs. Dunford seated herself wearily on a huge beam.

"Hang your moping!" the man burst forth. "Had I known you'd act this way, I'd never have brought you! Must you always be thinking of that fellow—of that accident? This is not Kennesbarre!"

The woman sighed. "The mine," said she, "brings it all back—no, no, it is something else, perhaps the air—I don't know what!" She let her veiled head sink into her hands.

"You're nervous; you need a rest," he said less harshly. "I'll send you to the springs when we get back."

The fire boss returned; an ax gleamed upon his shoulder. With a few blows he cut through and loosened the brattice and pulled it aside.

Here the air was still heavier,—dank, inert, full of decay. The three little oil lamps rattling in their caps burned dully. By the faint lurid reflex cast around, they saw the rotted beams of the deadwork, crumbling away or covered with mildew and bulging under the ponderous masses overhead. Stalactites of salt hung from the rocky roof, and old worn rails and wooden ties lay half buried in the silt of the ancient tunnel. In a great chamber excavated in one wall their lights revealed titanic masses of iron, huge boilers, and abandoned machinery, covered with earth, red with rust, sprawling amid a ruin of brickwork and tangled pipes coated with slime,—a mute, ghostly, and piteous wreck of power, now lying forgotten, dead, and useless in the vast tomb it had once helped to hollow. It was like the decayed monument of some vanished race.

"These workings have been 'robbed,'" said the fire boss; "that is, most of the intermediate supporting pillars of coal have been removed. The only way to reach the lower levels is by means of this slope."

They halted before the black, yawning mouth of the inclined tunnel.

"I am tired," said Mrs. Dunford; "I will wait here," and sat down on a block of slate.

"Very well," said her husband; "but I must go down—I've a plan to make use of these old levels. And I can just as well go alone," he added, turning to Mavis. "I know the run of the workings by heart."

The fire boss looked at Mrs. Dunford. He felt the vague terror and alarm that had attacked her. "If that is so," he answered slowly, "perhaps I had better remain here with the lady until you return."

**WITHOUT** another word Lawrence Dunford made his difficult way down the rock encumbered slope. The two left behind saw the light on his cap dwindle into a faint blue; then he vanished into a lateral gallery far down.

"That is the fourteen-hundred-foot level," spoke the fire boss; "he goes another hundred feet deeper."

"You have been long in the mines?" asked Mrs. Dunford.

"Since I was fifteen, Madam," answered Mavis.

"And always in this mine?"

"No, indeed. I've been here only five years. I've worked here and there from Pittston down. Nine years I spent in a big mine at Kennesbarre."

"At Kennesbarre!" she exclaimed in astonishment, lifting her head suddenly. "I knew the place well; I lived there once. There was a terrible disaster there sixteen years ago."

"I remember the accident," said the man, nodding his head. "A hundred and ten men were killed."

"I could not stand it!" said the woman with an expressive gesture. "Death was everywhere! I too lost a friend, a dear friend. And I left soon after."

"Friends—it is not only in mines that we lose them," said the fire boss solemnly.

"Perhaps you may remember my friend, if you were there. He was crushed to death before the mine caught fire. They never found his body. His name was Henry Mavis."

The fire boss seemed struck into rigidity; then with an effort he asked her to repeat the name. And it was again his own. His eyes widened, he stepped closer to the woman, took off his cap, and held it so that the rays fell full upon his blackened features. "It can't be," he said simply, "because I am Henry Mavis."

Mrs. Dunford gave a strange, inarticulate cry which echoed through the lonely gallery. She rose and seized the man by the arms, peered up into his eyes, covered his beard and mouth with her hands, pushed back the long hair from the brow, scrutinized the fine, regular features with her devouring gaze.

"Yes, yes! You are!" she cried hysterically. "Harry, Harry! It is you, you—and alive—alive!"

**HE** in turn now stared upon her in the sallow, smoky light, seeking to fathom her eyes under the projecting vizor of the cap, and the features half hidden by the voluminous motor veil. She loosened this; it hung down on each side, revealing the fair, full face and the light glinting hair that welled forth above her temples.

"Paula!" he exclaimed. "You, Paula? What brings you here?"

"Not dead!" she repeated over and over, again holding him by the arms, while her eyes, beaming with inexpressible joy, roved over the stalwart figure. "Not dead! Your voice! Why did I not know it at once? Yet it puzzled me. It has changed; you too have changed. I could not know you with that beard, nor—"

"All has changed, Paula," he said sorrowfully. "What made you think me dead?"

His voice was firm, his face like a tragic mask hewn from ebony. Her own eyes lost their light under the shadow of some sinister memory.

"They told me that you were dead; they said your

body was never found, that you were buried alive—or burned."

"Who said that?"

"Why—why, Mr. Dunford came to tell me that, after the disaster."

"Dunford, the superintendent? But why should he have told you that? He was the very one who knew I was alive. He said he was my friend; he had me taken at once to a hospital in Philadelphia. For seven months I lay there, less than a baby, with broken arms and crushed chest. And no word came from you, no answer to the letters Dunford wrote for me. I could not know why. I never learned the reason, except that when I returned to Kennesbarre you were gone, no one knew whither. It was said you left suddenly to be married, no one knew to whom."

"Yes, yes!" she said faintly, her voice struggling through her lips. "I thought you were dead, Harry. How could I know it was not so? I was all alone in Kennesbarre, alone like yourself. So I went to New York. He said you were buried alive; he said you were hurt!" she repeated helplessly.

"It might have been well for me if it had been so," returned the man in a sepulchral tone. "But I was not dead, as you see. When I found you gone, I lost all interest in myself, in life, in my ambitions, in culture and science, in the mastery of things I once longed to accomplish—for you—for myself! And so I remained a miner, instead of becoming a master,—a mere miner, Paula, though I have risen to be fire boss. Yes, they were quite right,—ever since that day I have really been buried alive."

He smiled grimly; yet in his speech there was a pathos and a pain that rose from some deep and long sealed grief at the foundations of his being.

"You are more than a mere miner, Henry. You are yourself—you will always be that. You are still what I always called you,—do you remember?—crystal among the coal,—yes, clear and pure as this fragment you just gave me."

**HE** lowered his fine head and leaned against the heavy framework at the mouth of the slope. His figure seemed to Paula Dunford like that of some shadowy, world weary Atlas, standing in the eclipse of his life and fettered by the insupportable burden of the dark, toilsome existence she had once inspired him to cast off, this man worthy of the stars. Tears sprang to her eyes; she wept silently for him—as for herself. Their two defrauded hearts beat in futile protest, empty as this "robbed" and abandoned mine. She reached for his hands, then gave a gasp as she raised the left one to the light. The ring finger was missing.

"I lost the finger in that accident," he said calmly. "The finger would not have mattered much; but the ring you gave me was on it. But perhaps the ring did not matter much, either—since I lost more than that."

She pressed an impulsive kiss upon the black, mutilated hand, and a hot tear fell on it. "But I loved you, Harry," she murmured. "I always loved you. This very day I thought of nothing but you—everything about this strange colliery spoke of you—of the old days." Her voice faltered; she let go his hand and sank down on the block of slate. "To think that we should meet again—after sixteen years—here in the depths of this mine—and so far from Kennesbarre!"

"There are greater distances than time or space," said the miner.

Then both were silent, until Mavis, his large eyes full of doubt and brooding, began repeating:

"Why should Dunford have lied about me? He took care of me; he was my friend—why should he have lied?"

The woman shook her head slowly and clasped and unclasped her hands in agitation. How simple was this strong and noble soul—how grandly simple, how beautifully trustful!

"That man," said Mavis suddenly, pointing down the profundity of the slope, "who is he?"

"My husband."

"Your name! What is it now?"

"Oh, do not ask me that!" she cried out in sudden terror. Then the next moment she added, "But you will learn it, after all. He comes to buy the mine. It is Dunford."

He looked at her fixedly; but in his eyes there lay a startled and pathetic look, a tremor came into his voice. "Dunford! He your husband? No, it cannot be! Dunford was a different man."

"He has changed—just as you, as I, have changed. It is sixteen years, Henry."

Then a light broke upon his mind, illuminating all the enigmatic, fateful past, devastating his long faith in this man, striking like a forked, flaming bolt into the tender tissues of his heart and mind; a flash rending yet clarifying all, betraying the hideous, traitorous plot whereby he had been cheated of this woman, and she of him.

He too sat down wearily, as one suddenly aged or overborne by calamity; a few broken words escaped him; he let his head sink. His shoulders heaved, and there came from him that sound that breaks the hearts of women and undoes their souls with pity,—the sobbing of a strong and suffering man. She stroked his hair.

"We are fellow victims, my Harry," said she. "He too has been punished—love was dead between us from the very beginning."

**THE** silence that ensued was suddenly broken by a distant uproar, a rumble, a faint alarm of bells. There came also a scent of burning, as of straw, borne in on the wandering air currents. The fire boss leaped to his feet.

"Wait here!" he exclaimed, then ran toward the opening through which they had come. A full quarter-hour

elapsed ere he returned, enveloped in a mist of smoke. His smoldering clothes, covered with sparks, burst suddenly into flame as he approached. He tore off his flannel shirt and stood bare to the waist, his black face and beard in sharp contrast to the white skin of his body.

"The stables and deadwork in the northwest gangway are afire," he said; "the men have already been taken out. I could not get to the hoist because of the smoke and flame. I'm afraid they think we're already out of this, as I told the foreman we intended going to the higher levels."

She screamed and clung to him.

"Do not be afraid," he said; "you are safe."

Now was heard a far-off rushing sound of confined waters dashing and roaring, a liquid thunder that reverberated and muttered fearfully.

"Those are the pumps at work," said Mavis calmly. "They have turned the water into part of this level to flood the fire. We are safe here, however; for the level of this old gallery here is higher than the top of that yonder. When the gangway is flooded, they'll turn the water into the abandoned workings down there."

He sprang toward the mouth of the slope down which Dunford had vanished. Paula clung to his arm.

"No, no!" she implored, and in her frantic tone a savage instinct of hate strove with a new-born tenderness. "Do not go! Do not risk your life—not for his! If anything happens to him, he deserves it—he separated us! And now that I've found you, I'll not let you go again—no, no!"

He shook off her hold and made several steps downward. "He separated us, yes; but he also saved my life," he said, frowning, "and, were he ten times the dog he is, I'd risk my own to square the deal!"

**SHE** wrung her hands as he clambered swiftly down the rock-strewn descent. With a threatening, muffled roar the distant waters surged through the mine; it seemed to her they must fill every drift and heading as they stormed and foamed from the throats of the colossal pipes. After awhile she saw a little light appear at the bottom of the fourteen-hundred-foot level—only one.

Panting, streaming with sweat, and streaked with soot, black and formidable as a demon, Mavis climbed up the slope.

"My God! Where is he?" screamed the wife.

Mavis, breathing heavily, made no reply; but ran toward the broken brattice, returning with the ax.

Horror, fear, and uncertainty played across the features of Mrs. Dunford. "Tell me!" she cried hoarsely, laying hold of the ax. "Where is he? You have not killed him? You are not going to kill him, Henry?"

"No," said Mavis; "I am going to save him. He is caught by the legs under a heavy fall of earth and rock, brought down from the roof of the lowest level by the running of the water above. I tried to pull him out; but could not. That often happens here, as I told you. It's a case of life or limb—we save the life and leave the limb. Let me go!" he exclaimed feverishly, twisting the ax handle out of her hands. "The roof is working, and any moment he may be buried alive! Quick! Give me some cloth from your dress!"

She bent and tore a wide length off the skirt of her silken petticoat. Then once more a frightful temptation attacked her soul,—a battle between the bondage of duty and the bondage of an old love that had burst forth anew. Fate was offering her freedom again, and happiness, even in this hour of death—were she but strong enough to take it. She stood in the grim mouth of the shaft and spread out her arms. The flame burning in her little cap, and the long veil, made her vague and nebulous as the Angel of Death.

"Henry, I'll not let you go!" she cried madly. "You've done enough! It is retribution—fate—justice! Let him be!"

"Letting him be is murdering him!" shouted the man. "If more rock drops, he'll be buried alive!"

"You too were buried alive, Henry!" wailed the woman, still holding wide her arms to restrain him. "You—"

"Well, we are both buried alive," he cried harshly; "but by Heaven, Paula, let us at least be buried with clean hearts."

He pushed away her arm and plunged down the slope once more. The ax blade made a patch of livid light in the shadows. The wife of Lawrence Dunford sank to her knees, then lay flat on the ground; she stretched her head and her arms toward the retreating man.

"Crystal among the coal always!—the same fine crystal among the common coal!" she murmured.

**THEN** she prayed,—prayed the prayer of a passionate, despairing woman,—prayed to the deaf, blind, and juggling Fates that she might achieve some happiness again, that she might once more know love as it had been revealed to her in the heart of this true man. So she waited, alone with her vast emotions, relentless thoughts, and fierce hopes, peering like some harpy with flaming eyes steadily down into the impetuous depths that had swallowed up the two men.

Finally a faint glow grew visible, then a naked point of flame. Again but one! A feeling of relentless triumph shot through her breast. But, she reflected, her husband's lamp would naturally have gone out. As the light drew near she desisted Mavis slowly and painfully making his way up the long steep slope, a shapeless burden upon his back. She thought with a shudder of the limb the ax must have lopped away.

Half dead with exhaustion, his face set and his eyes astare, his naked breast heaving with the mighty exertion, the fire boss staggered from the slope and laid his helpless charge at the feet of Paula Dunford. Shrinking

Continued on page 18

an empty suite below us for dancing, and got an orchestra and a whole lot of gilt chairs. I figured it out today that I was about thirty-seven thousand dollars in the hole up to date. The Count had come high; but Marg had to have him, and so long as she was happy and I could keep out of jail I didn't care. Knowing that it was a love match, and the Count wasn't after Marg's money, it didn't matter. I could stand it.

**THAT'S** the way it stood this morning, when I went down town to my grind. Florists all over the house, men nailing down canvas on the floors, footmen in everybody's way, a lot of extra maids and servants fussing about, and the caterers stewing things in the kitchen! I was glad to clear out and get down to my office where I could be quiet. Worked like a Chinaman all day, and tried to forget we were marrying into the nobility.

"I was so nervous and excited, though, that I couldn't stand eating lunch in a restaurant where I should be likely to meet any of my friends; so I dropped into one of those little cheap, quick-lunch, ham-and-egg places under the Brooklyn Bridge. I ordered some weak tea and milk toast, and was trying to read the paper, when I heard a voice that simply paralyzed me. It was behind a flimsy wooden partition, in the kitchen, and it was yelling 'Draw one!' or something like that. Perhaps it was 'Ham and over!'

"Then a waiter in a dirty suit came out of the doorway, with about sixteen dishes balanced along his arm, and an apron on. It was the Count Capricorn. Yes, that's right! That miserable waiter was the man that about eighteen servants and six hundred guests were preparing for up at Wycherley Court. And I had spent something like thirty-seven thousand dollars so that he wouldn't be ashamed of Marguerite!"

Morgan stopped and smiled sadly. "I don't think he saw me at all. He turned to put some things on a table, and I bolted without waiting for my lunch. You see how I'm fixed, don't you? I thought that if he did show up tonight, so that we could get the reception over with, I could get rid of him tomorrow, forever. But he didn't come."

Fenton shook his head. "No," he answered, "and I don't think you'll ever see him again. I guess he's done for, poor fellow!"

**MORGAN** construed the remark according to his own lights, probably thinking that the Count had suspected that his real identity had been discovered. Fenton did not explain; he dared not say that he was virtually sure that the bogus Count Capricorn lay dead in an office on the thirteenth story of the St. Paul Building. He wanted to forget what he had seen—at least until he had performed his duty. The revenue it threw him into was broken by Morgan.

"You see what I was up against," "Must have been embarrassing," said Fenton.

"Embarrassing? Well, I guess! When eleven o'clock came, and he hadn't come, I told Marg all about it, and she nearly went crazy. 'What are we going to do?' she said—as if I knew! There we were again without the guest of honor; Hamlet, with the Prince left out. The place was beginning to fill up, and everybody was asking questions."

"Well, what did you do?" said Fenton, beginning to be amused.

"Marg was splendid; she took right hold of it. She told me that I'd simply got to get somebody to impersonate the Count, or she would be disgraced forever, and meantime she'd tell everybody that the Count had been delayed in Washington and would arrive at midnight. That would give me an hour to work it out. I confess I was frightened to death. I didn't like to deceive people; but what else could I do? Marg would be insane if I didn't save her reputation."

"Well, the only person I could think of was Harold Ringrose, a college mate of mine. We often played bezique together. He's a manufacturing chemist, down on Vesey-st. I rung up his house; but they said he was down town. I tried his office—no answer. There was nothing for me to do but go down there and find him, and try to get him to play the part. I thought I could play the old friendship and family honor strong enough to induce him. He knows hardly anybody, and no one would ever suspect him. So I drove down there. There was a light in the sixth-story window, but I couldn't get any answer to the bell; and after I'd shouted as loud as I dared, a policeman told me to move on. So I drove back, not knowing what to do, till I met you."

Morgan suddenly turned and grasped Fenton's arm with both his. "Do this for me, for Heaven's sake!" he exclaimed, and weakly burst into tears. "God knows I never wanted all this fluff and feathers!" he sobbed. "I'm a simple man with simple ways. I

don't like fashion and footmen and things—I want to be let alone—only Marguerite!"

"Oh, brace up, old man!" Fenton cried heartily. "I'll save your face for you. Depend on me. It'll be a good joke on all these snobs. Is everything ready?"

"Yes. Here, we're almost home now! Home! God! I wish I'd never seen Wycherley Court."

## IX. WYCHERLEY COURT

**THEY** had been going up Riverside Drive, and as Morgan spoke they approached a tall marble apartment house from which an awning stretched across the sidewalk to the curb. Here a line of carriages and automobiles were in line waiting to discharge their passengers.

Morgan leaned forward and tapped his chauffeur on the shoulder. "Round to the side entrance!" he commanded.

Here he and Fenton got out, and made their way rapidly into and along a corridor to the back stairs. They climbed ten stories, and arrived panting at the back door of the Morgan apartment, were let in by a staring servant, and conducted rapidly along the hall. As they passed, Fenton heard the continuous sound of gable and intermingled talk and laughter of many guests, inarticulate, confused, an uneasy murmur of voices. It sounded to him as if it might come from some monstrous, horrid beast with innumerable mouths. Servants of all kinds skittered past him as he made his way,—waiters loaded with dishes, maids with women's wraps, men servants,—gossiping, loafing, gaping. A high, clear laugh rose over all this subdued tumult.

"Marg's holding the fort!" said Morgan admiringly, and led the way into his own chamber. "Now for Heaven's sake hurry!"

**FENTON** had time only to see a wide white bed laid out with a complete outfit—evening clothes, shirt, tie—when two men servants fell upon him and tore off his coat, vest, and trousers with the fury of maniacs. As they held the dress trousers for him, a young woman put her head through the door excitedly.

"Has he come?" she cried. And then, "Oh, there you are! Thank goodness!"

Fenton took a leap into the black trousers just as she burst into the room.

"Is he ready?" she cried eagerly. "For Heaven's sake hurry, you idiots! I can't wait a minute longer. Stillwell, put on his shoes, quick! Here, you crazy loon, you've got that collar upside down! For Heaven's sake let me do it, if you're all halfwitted!" And Fenton found himself suddenly confronted by a tall, pretty, blue-eyed girl with flushed cheeks, all in white, with three ostrich feathers nodding in her hair. "Hold your head still!" she commanded. "I can't do anything if you move that way! Here, you, put his gloves on, quick!"

A man attacked each hand. Stillwell Morgan still fussed at the bows of Fenton's shoes. Marguerite Magnol Morgan, in white gloves, with orchids on her breast, her flushed face within an inch of his, worked over Fenton like a window dresser with a wax figure. Her sweet breath was in his face, her curls brushed his cheeks, as she patted and pulled at his tie. He saw her pretty mouth working with nervousness. Then she stepped back and looked at him.

"Mercy!" she shrieked. "This isn't Mr. Ringrose! Who is it?" She stared at him with big eyes, and turned scarlet.

"I believe I have the honor of being Count Capricorn!" said Fenton, bowing low.

A maid tapped at the door, and entered halfway. "Mrs. Grahamson-Davis wants to see you, Miss Morgan," she said. "She has to go home. Says she can't wait any longer."

Miss Morgan grabbed Fenton by one arm. "Come!" she commanded savagely. "I don't care who you are, you'll do! If I can only satisfy that old Mrs. Grahamson-Davis, I'm safe!" and she dragged him out of the room into the hall.

Here he asserted himself, offered his other arm, tossed his head erect, and stepped off with her. If he was to play a part, he decided it would be that of a man, not a puppet. Miss Morgan looked up at him with admiration.

"It was awfully good of you to come!" she breathed.

"It's about time for something like that to be said," he replied haughtily. "You treat me right, or I'll spoil the show!"

"Oh, I'll do anything—anything!" she exclaimed; then, dropping her voice, she added, "I wish you were Count Capricorn!"

With this exquisite compliment pleasantly ringing in his ears, he navigated his way through staring, whispering groups of guests and entered the reception room. A buzz of comments greeted them. Everybody stared; they were immediately surrounded; innumerable introductions began.

**FENTON**, for the first time in his life in evening dress, with a foolish wild longing that Belle Carillon might see him, played his part like a veteran. As one eager, curious person after another was presented, he bowed, shook hands, uttered pleasantries, laughed, and gestured, and shrugged his shoulders as if he had been the petted hero of society all his life.

Of all the remarkable situations he found himself in that mad night, this was perhaps the most dangerous. The very peril of it, however, inspired him. The gaiety of the scene went to his head like a cocktail; his mind worked like an exquisitely adjusted high-speed machine. The crowd, elaborately dressed, wore about him, smiling, pretty women and attentive men, the lights of electric fans and cutglass and precious stones flashed in his eyes, the perfume of frangipani and petit d'Espagne mingled with the wafted odors of oysters and terrapin from the dining room. The clink of glasses tinkled with laughter laden voices. The music of an orchestra sobbed and swelled with the voices of heartbroken strings, and twittered with love-lorn wood instruments.

It stimulated his imagination to the boiling point. He talked as he had never talked before,—of things he knew nothing of, things he didn't believe, things as far outside of his life as Chimborazo or Cambodia. It was the easier when he perceived that nobody listened,—everyone was hysterical, hypnotized, eager to add his or her nonsense to the general babel. He talked wildly of bridge and golf, of plays he had never seen, of countries he had never visited. But he might as well have said anything,—that he was dead and buried, that he had forgotten to wear a shirt, that his mother had whiskers. No one would have noticed. He gossiped of Kings and Princesses, he mentioned at least seven new wonders of the world. The women giggled, the men said "Really!" and no one knew but that he had been speaking commonplaces.

"You're doing fine—fine!" Miss Morgan whispered to him at the first respite. "I'm proud of you!" She looked up under her lashes coquettishly. "What a pity we're not really engaged! The poor Count!"

**AT** that there came to him suddenly a flash of remembrance of the adventurer, dead in the St. Paul Building. The memory swept like a chill wind over his soul and awakened him to his almost forgotten duty. The jewels! He had forgotten all about them. At this minute he should be speeding

up town to Harlem, to keep his promise. What right had he here, in this absurd disguise? The charm of the adventure had gone to his head. He must be about his business.

Just as he was casting about for a pretext to go, his ears caught the sound of a name, "Miss Belle Carillon," and he turned, shocked and trembling, to see before him the girl of his dreams. There she was, olive skin and soft hazel eyes, whimsical mouth, the pretty, slender girl he had already seen twice that evening. She was staring at him, and her brows were knitted.

"Haven't we—met before?" she asked hesitatingly, as she held out her hand.

What could he say? Surely he could not disclaim her acquaintance, neither should he stultify his hostess. For a moment everything seemed to go black in front of him, then that very feeling suggested an excuse for not answering. He put his hand to his heart and dropped to a chair.

"I feel faint," he murmured. "Will you pardon me, Miss Morgan, if I—"

"You'd better go into Still's room for a moment," she suggested. She beckoned to her brother, who came crowding up. "Take him out, he's fainting!" she commanded. "This crush is too much for him—you know he hasn't yet recovered from that attack yesterday."

Fenton staggered out on Morgan's arm, and, as the crowd made way for him, he saw Miss Carillon's eyes still upon him, with a puzzled, questioning expression. He felt base and mean.

"I must get out of here right away!" he exclaimed, as soon as they were alone in Morgan's chamber. "I've spent too much time already—I've neglected a terribly important errand."

"You've saved my life, old man," said Stillwell Morgan effusively. "I don't know what we ever should have done. You've made an awful hit. People are crazy about you! Why, Marguerite says—"

"Confound Marguerite! Where's that bag I brought?" Fenton looked eagerly about the room.

"I don't know who you are; but I'd be glad to have you consider me your friend, and if I can do anything in the world—"

"Find that bag!" Fenton exclaimed excitedly. "Lord, Man! if you knew what was in it—! He groped under the bed."

"Why, isn't it here? Say, I'll call one of the men." Morgan went to the door.

"If that isn't found I'm ruined!" cried Fenton. "Haven't you any detectives here?"

To be continued next Sunday

## CRYSTAL AMONG COAL

Continued from page 4

away, she nevertheless glanced at it,—her husband, unconscious, his fine clothes torn to shreds, his face red with blood and black with coal dust; but with all his limbs unimpaired. Yet his legs lay strangely limp.

"I got him out," said Mavis, panting and gasping for breath, "without using the ax; but his legs are broken."

Paula Dunford looked down on the inert human mass at her feet,—this man twelve years older than he to whom she had once been plighted, this man who had thwarted their loves so he might win her for himself, who had grown rich and puissant in the great metropolis at the Hudson's mouth, and then her eyes wandered to the poor, half naked, and obscure fire boss who had just torn him living from his grave. Coal and crystal—and the coal was hers!

Mavis, somewhat rested, again took the unconscious Dunford upon his shoulders and walked heavily toward the brattice that led back to the other galleries. He went a long, circuitous way, avoiding the water, doubling, and returning, and doubling again upon the great, black gangways and narrow drifts. Paula Dunford followed silently.

They reached one of the great ventilating doors. It was locked—from the other side. Henry Mavis laid his man on the ground, climbed a ladder in a stall, then made his way through a narrow cresset airway, crawling on hands and knees until he came through to the other main gangway. Through this the water was still pouring like a river; but it had sunk several feet from the roof as it drained away steadily into the old workings. The carcasses of drowned mules floated in the tearing stream, bales of straw and great beams. He dropped into the water up to his armpits and, breasting the savage current, forced his way toward the cross gangway that led to the other side of the door.

Once he slipped on the submerged track and sank; but soon recovered his foothold. His light was extinguished; all was black. For all that, knowing his bearings well, he struggled on steadily, emerged from the

flooded gallery, and at last reached the great door. He drew the bolt and pulled it open. The fierce draft blew out the light in Mrs. Dunford's cap. As she heard the water dripping from his clothes in the thick darkness, she exclaimed in pity and fresh alarm.

"It is nothing," came his voice in the stark night, as he went on toward the hoist. "Earth, air, fire, water,—these are things a man can fight against. Come, hold me by the belt."

**THEY** lifted Lawrence Dunford from the ear and laid him on the ground. The small eyes in the heavy visage opened and the hard, soulless features were stricken and subdued with pain. Mrs. Dunford was helped out and went at once to the side of her husband. She heard a cry, a fourfold cry of joy, and, turning her head, saw Henry Mavis in the arms of a young and comely woman who covered his face with kisses, while two young girls and a little lad clung to his bare arms and shouted for joy.

He stood in the sunlight, his face, arms, and body washed clean and white by the waters in the mine, a splendid figure, pure and heroic as the soul within it. A faint smile dawned on his lips, a smile of serenity and content. Protruding from one of the pockets of his wet, clinging trousers Paula caught a glimpse of the white silk strip she had torn from her dress. He had kept it!

Then her eyes fell to the distorted, blood stained, sooty features of her husband, the defiled clothes and broken form. Several men were preparing to carry the injured mine broker into the foreman's office. She followed them,—she followed her duty. But her teeth were set, her eyes fell, she clenched her hands until one of them pained her strangely. This hand she raised to look at it. On the soft bruised palm, beside the wedding ring, and glistening like diamonds in the sun, lay the sharp and pointed crystal given to her in the mine by Henry Mavis—the broken morsel of crystal she had unwittingly retained.